

THE FUTURE—AND A WARNING.

INVENTORS of all classes bemoan a difficulty in obtaining that financial support which alone will enable them to put their ideas into practical form. Capitalists, according to them, are cold, calculating, sceptical fellows who will not part with their money until they are assured of a definite return—and sometimes not even then. The capitalist, on the other hand, says that where one inventor may have an idea that is worthy of exploitation there are a thousand who are either quite impossible visionaries or equally impossible rogues. Well, the outsider, with neither the brains of the one nor the shekels of the other, can see eye to eye with both, and can realise the difficulties of each. The inventor is habitually regarded with a certain amount of suspicion, if only for the reason that he seeks monetary aid, and the one man who has marketable value to offer in return for assistance must suffer with his thousand unprovided brothers.

Inventions are regarded with as much scepticism as inventors, and the very word is sufficient to cause a smile in almost any company, but in no instance is the cheap scorn of the ignorant more manifest than when the invention has even the remotest connection with a flying machine. So very recently the possibility of human flight was still a dream, as far as the public was concerned, that the old doubts have not yet quite passed away. It is bad for the *bona fide* genius that the profession of invention, if one may use the term, should be so discredited, but just as there's a silver lining to the cloud, so the situation has its saving points.

The beginnings of the automobile industry were dogged by a determined bird of prey that used its best endeavours to pick the bones while yet its victim lived. The bird was named the wild-cat company promoter, but the victim, rescued from his clutches, lived in spite of him. For a while the ill-omened harbinger of financial doom flourished mightily, principally, no doubt, because the public, in the first flush of enthusiasm, was simply waiting to be gulled. But then the motor car was tangible and comprehensible, even while it only ran by fits and starts, while the flying machine is—or was until quite lately—an incredible thing, the "wireless" of locomotion—a machine which is supported upon an invisible medium, where the motor car runs along the hard and obvious high road. So automobilism offered opportunities of speculation which are not evident in aviation, and we may congratulate ourselves that up to the present the very caution and suspicion that to a certain extent has delayed progress have guarded the infant industry from the unwelcome attentions of this class of company promoter.

Those who have the best interests of the movement at heart are ever watching for future developments, and it was with some foreboding that the effects of such flying successes as attended the Rheims meeting were awaited. Cause for alarm was given by the Blackpool and Doncaster meetings in this connection, and it is, perhaps, just as well that these events were not so completely successful as to immediately popularise the "sport" of flying, and so invite a sudden rush of eager speculation. No worse fate could befall the movement, especially at the present juncture, than that its struggles to gain a footing should be hampered by the ill-judged and over-capitalised flotations that weighed down the youthful motor trade.

We say with feeling, therefore, and not without some little knowledge, that those who profess themselves well-

wishers of the aeronautical industry will do their utmost to preserve the sound basis upon which it rests at present. The speculator of the professional type who seeks for means of self-enrichment in every turn of life cannot be blamed if he trades upon the gullibility of the public, for his is a selfishness that is magnificent in its comprehensiveness, and as a general thing he does not seek to hide behind a mask of philanthropic disinterestedness. Thus, against the danger presented by this type we are, in some measure, forearmed, and if his ends are gained in spite of us, we can but blame the innate foolishness of those who lend the support of name and funds to schemes they do not fully comprehend. But it is not the open self-acknowledged enemy from whom we have the most to fear. It is the possible traitor in the camp of aviation who may be the greatest foe.

The sudden birth of aero clubs throughout the country proves that behind a calm and careless exterior runs a strong current of interest in the problems of the air, and even this so-called conservative, unready England of ours is able to put into the field quite a number of promising designs for aeroplanes of one type and another. This fact, however, is one that must be read with characteristic British caution, for at the same time that the slightest encouragement has brought forth, say, a score of legitimate machines, some complete, others in model form, and yet others not beyond the paper stage, so the sun has shone upon a host who, with no knowledge of the simplest elements of aviation, still seek to rush in upon the rising tide of prosperity.

Discrimination is difficult for the uninitiated investor, who might, indeed, with a sudden change of front, fail to recognise the wild-cat nature of some of the schemes that may be brought before him. He has as much reason to be wary of the impractical inventor as of the company promoter himself. Still, it is important that the pitfalls which await his faltering footsteps should not have the effect of frightening him of the whole breed of aeroplane inventors, for there are many among them who are worthy of support. There are, doubtless, numerous clever brains at work on problems that have either actually been solved or else proved useless for the purposes of flight. They devote their energies to a profitless task for the lack of the few pounds with which to purchase records of past experiments, failures and successes, when the same keen enthusiasm in the cause might conceivably perform much useful work were the intellect behind it properly directed.

It must be clear, therefore, that money is much needed, but that the money must be suitably applied if good is to result. One might suggest a hundred ways in which assistance could be given—to the struggling inventor, for instance, who, by reason of his straitened circumstances, is unable to complete the machine with which, in his eyes, the world is to be conquered, and so he cannot try for any of the various prizes that are offered to refill his purse. But always natural optimism, although in some degree permissible, must be discounted, and the merits of the scheme inquired most closely into. And always in the background the sinister shape of the company promoter lies in wait for opportunities. There in the background must he stay at any cost if the cause of aviation is to be saved from the fate that so nearly overtook its sister industry.

For that reason we once more raise this warning note against any such exploitations which may be in the air.